DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 516 CE 064 240

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|---|---|
| TITLE | Gender Equity and the Year 2000. WEEA Digest. |
| INSTITUTION | Education Development Center, Inc., Newton, Mass. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Women's Educational Equity Act Program (ED), Washington, DC. |
| PUB DATE | Mar 91 |
| NOTE | 7p. |
| PUB TYPE | Information Analyses (070) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Conferences; Educational Legislation; Educational Objectives; *Equal Education; *Equal Opportunities (Jobs); Federal Legislation; *Futures (of Society); Nontraditional Occupations; *Program Effectiveness; Program Implementation; Secondary Education; *Sex Fairness; *Womens Education |
| IDENTIFIERS | National Education Goals 1990; *Womens Educational Equity Act |

ABSTRACT

During the past 17 years, the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) program has accomplished the following: funded programs to open math, science, and technology courses and careers to women and girls; helped females gain access to nontraditional vocational education; funded projects to eliminate bias against females in school and the workplace; funded major programs to improve educational opportunities and career choices for low-income women; targeted resources toward the educational needs of disabled women; and disseminated gender equity materials. The following are among the actions that WEEA programs have shown to be critical to improving gender equity: build collaborations, involve new parties, confront "isms" head on, encourage new visions, begin early, include both females and males in gender equity efforts, and disseminate knowledge already gained and build on it. The 1991 WEEA conference 1991 focused on the National Education Goals for the year 2000 through presentations devoted to the need for females in science, program evaluation, equity in the work world, student retention and teen pregnancy and parenting, and excellence in education through gender equity. The WEEA Publishing Center has developed a new middle school curriculum designed to reduce dropout rates. (MN)

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MARCH 1991

ED 360 516

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WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL EQUITY ACT PUBLISHING CENTER

DIGEST

Education Development Center, Inc.
OERI, U.S. Department of Education

# Gender equity and the year 2000

An old proverb claims "Women hold up half the sky," and by the year 2000 this will be true economically: women will compose half the workforce. Knowing this, if we are to continue to be an economically strong nation, we must utilize all our resources to their fullest. And education can be the prime vehicle for preparing this new workforce—now only nine years away.

## Education reform and gender

Beginning with the release of *A Nation at Risk*, numerous reports have focused on the needs of our educational system. The National Goals for Education released by President Bush in 1990 underscore this concern: "Today a new standard for an educated citizenry is required, one suitable for the next century. Our people must be as knowledgeable, as well-trained, as competent, and as inventive as those in any nation. . . . America can meet this challenge if our society is dedicated to a renaissance in education. . . . Sweeping, fundamental change in our education system must be made."[1]

President Bush and the nation's governors have proposed a series of education goals for the nation—goals that will change the face of education and the workplace within the next nine years. As we examine the ways in which we can best prepare for the year 2000 we need to identify strategies to increase the access and success of women. The Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) Program has much to offer in terms of what we as a nation have learned about how to create and sustain nonsexist, multicultural programs that increase the success of both females and males.

**. . . we must encourage and support programs that work for the diverse groups that make up our American population.**

As we examine education reform and the new workplace, we can use learning gathered from over 17 years of the WEEA Program to inform our policies. Charol Shakeshaft, a nationally recognized educator and researcher, has documented that, still, most schools and teachers use methods that favor the approximately 15 percent of the school population that is made up of white males. In order to have a true "renaissance in education," one of the key moves we must make is to encourage and support programs that work for the diverse groups that make up our American population. This means working with schools to reach and support all students, including those of "special populations"—girls, people of color, and people with disabilities—who make up the other 85 percent of our schools.[2]

## Challenges continue

Even with the gains that women have made—and there are many—since the WEEA Program was established, major obstacles and inequities are still evident. As Deborah L. Rhode, director of the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at Stanford University, points out, "Statutes have been en-

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acted to secure similar treatment for persons similarly situated; less effort has centered on remedying the structural factors that contribute to women's dissimilar and disadvantaged status."[3]

Girls are still significantly underrepresented in high school math and science courses, many never taking elective or advanced courses in either field. The same is true of computer courses and use of computers outside of school. This "choice," on the part of female students, closes the door on the possibility of pursuing math or science degrees in college and greatly narrows options for careers in technical or nontraditional fields, where pay is generally much higher than in traditionally female occupations.

Poverty is still the "female disease." In 1988, women represented 62 percent of all people 16 years and older who live under the poverty line. Women still make only 70 cents for every dollar made by men. The median income of women who work year round, full time, was $17,606 in 1988, compared to $26,656 for men. This, while the majority of working women are doing so because of economic need, either as female heads of household or as contributors to households where the joint income is less than $15,000.[4] In 1980, the National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity predicted that "all other things being equal, if the proportion of the poor who are in female headed families were to increase at the same rate as it did from 1967 to 1977, [this population] would comprise 100% of the poverty population by the year 2000."

And many of the gains made by women as a whole over the last decades have not translated so well for women of color. Women with the double barriers of gender and minority race or ethnicity face additional burdens. For example, the average African-American woman working year round, full time makes $16,538, and the average Latina only $14,845. The unemployment rate for African-American women is 9.8 percent compared to 3.9 for White men and 4.0 for White women (although African-American men top the list at 10.0 percent). The latest figures for Native-American women, from the 1980 census, show that they have an unemployment rate of 12 percent. And the picture is much worse for disabled women of all races and cultures. In 1980, only two-thirds of the disabled women who were employed—just 21 percent of all disabled women—had salaries above the poverty line.[5]

The increase in the percentage of poverty-level families during the 1980s hit people of color hardest. For example, the poverty rate for African-American women declined most during the 1960s. Progress slowed dramatically during the 1970s, although the rate continued to decline. But the poverty rate actually began to rise again after 1980. In 1987, the poverty rate for children in African-American families headed by females returned to the rate it was 20 years before. And this bleak situation has been compounded by the cutbacks in "safety net" programs throughout the 1980s.[6]

**For almost 20 years, WEEA projects have addressed critical issues such as those currently identified as part of the education reform movement.**

In the workforce, while laws have helped eliminate some barriers to women in nontraditional vocations, at the rate women are currently entering these fields, it will take between 75 and 100 years to achieve a fully integrated work force. Most women are still found in low-status, low-paying, "pink-collar" jobs.

The nation has already glimpsed what happens when barriers for women are reduced: the number of women scientists and mathematicians increases, more women become successful entrepreneurs, more women move into corporate and educational administration, the number of women holding political office increases, and both men and women are more able to pursue lives that are emotionally and economically fulfilling. As we move toward the implementation of the vision promised in the National Education Goals and closer to the reality of Workforce 2000 we can look to the lessons of the WEEA Program for guidance.

**What we know**

For almost 20 years, WEEA projects have addressed critical issues such as those currently identified as part of the education reform movement. WEEA projects have created math and science curricula designed to encourage the interest of girls and students of color. Some have addressed the need to encourage women in administration. Others have researched the needs of female dropouts and found ways to retain girls who are at risk of dropping out. Still others have addressed the special educational needs of Native-American women, African-American students, single parents and displaced homemakers, Latino students, and Asian women. Since 1974, WEEA-funded projects have had a considerable impact on their communities and on the country.

Some of the cutting edge achievements of WEEA are documented in *Catching Up: A Review of the Women's Educational Equity Act Program.* (1) WEEA has been a leader in funding programs to open math, science, and technology courses and careers to women and girls and has encouraged their participation by supporting important programs to overcome past stereotyping. (2) WEEA took the lead in opening doors to girls and women in nontraditional vocational education, funding projects to eliminate bias and discrimination against women and girls in the trades, apprenticeships,

**WEEA has funded major programs to improve educational opportunities and career choices for low-income women—to help break the cycle of poverty, unemployment, and underemployment of women.**

and vocational programs. (3) WEEA has funded major programs to improve educational opportunities and career choices for low-income women—to help break the cycle of poverty, unemployment, and underemployment of women. (4) WEEA has led the way in supporting programs on double discrimination based on both sex and race/ethnicity. WEEA has made minority women's concerns a national priority. (5) WEEA was the first (and to date only) federal program to target resources on the educational needs of disabled women—the most invisible and underserved women in the country. (6) WEEA ensures wide dissemination of materials developed by grants through the work of the WEEA Publishing Center.[7]

We have learned a lot over the last two decades of WEEA programs. The messages that WEEA delivers are powerful. They can inform and influence ongoing work as well as form the basis for new directions and approaches. These lessons include the following:

- Build collaborations. Engage other people in talking about and exploring relationships between equitable education and the economy.
- Involve new parties. Create new social partnerships by bringing new people to the table to imagine the future.
- Be comprehensive. Projects must address, or at least be aware of, the multiple needs of the population they serve. They must be relevant to what individuals perceive are their pressing issues.
- Embed equity within a whole approach. Build an infrastructure to surround the idea. Patches don't work.
- Confront "isms" head on. Deal with racism, sexism, bias, and stereotyping in an upfront manner. Without doing this, we create barriers that will guarantee failure.
- Look through the lens of equity. Focus on equity and excellence will follow. Equity is not just nice, it is essential; well-done equity projects lead the way toward good ideas for everyone.
- Encourage new visions. Equity raises the level of expectations and capitalizes on human potential. Take advantage of this.
- Begin early. Equity in parenting and early childhood is essential.
- Be patient. The devastating effects of generations of gender bias cannot be undone immediately. As one sex-equity specialist notes, "The notion that you could unbind the feet of a little girl and the next day she could run the marathon is simply faulty."[8]
- Include both females and males. As we encourage women and girls to grow and expand their options, we need to develop similar efforts to help males both support these changes and to expand their own potentials.
- Disseminate what we know and build on it. Researchers and educators point to the body of knowledge that exists through WEEA and other equity organizations; this model of dissemination does not exist for other parts of the equity movement. The existence of this body of knowledge and the national distribution of models has enabled organizations throughout the country to replicate and expand services to meet the needs of local populations—and, in turn, to share that new knowledge with others. This dynamic process continues to raise new questions about education, equity, and excellence, and to provide new insights to policymakers as they attempt to address the major issues of our society.

**Confront "isms" head on. Deal with racism, sexism, bias and stereotyping. . . . Focus on equity and excellence will follow.**

*Katherine Hanson*
*Sundra Flansburg*

**Notes**

[1]"The White House, Office of the Secretary, "National Goals for Education," press release, February 26, 1990.
[2]Charol Shakeshaft, "A Gender at Risk," *Phi Delta Kappan* (March 1986): 499.
[3]Deborah L. Rhode, "Gender Equality and Employment Policy," in *The American Woman, 1990–91: A Status Report*, ed. by Sara E. Rix (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), 174.
[4]U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, "20 Facts on Women Workers," (Sept. 1990), 2–3.
[5]"20 Facts on Women Workers," 2–3; C. Matthew Snipp, "A Portrait of American Indian Women and Their Labor Force Experiences," in *The American Woman, 1990-91: A Status Report*, 268.
[6]Harriet Pipes McAdoo, "A Portrait of African American Families in the United States," in *The American Woman, 1990–91: A Status Report*, 82–83.
[7]Citizens Council on Women's Education, *Catching Up: A Review of the Women's Educational Equity Act Program* (Washington, D.C.: National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, 1984), 3.
[8]Rebecca Lubetkin, testimony to State of New Jersey legislature on the importance of gender equity, June 1989.

## Important equity facts

- By 1988, there were over 100,000 female doctors in the U.S., more than twice the number in 1975.
- By 1990, women represented 40% of all executives, managers, and administrators.
- In 1986, women earned 30% of the degrees in the physical sciences, mathematics, life sciences, and social sciences.
- In 1985, the percentage of women earning B.S. degrees in engineering was almost 14%, compared to 0.3% in 1960.
- Women now constitute 20% of all dentists, 40% of all veterinarians, and 50% of all pharmacists.

**But**, women still constitute large proportions of workers in traditionally female occupations.

- In 1989, 80% of all administrative support (mostly clerical) workers were women.
- In 1989, women were only 9% of precision production, craft, and repair workers and only 7.2% of the apprentices.
- While women accounted for 45% of the workforce and will remain in the labor force almost as long as men, they continue to earn 70 cents for every dollar earned by men.

# *WEEA conference focuses on National Education Goals*

This January, equity practitioners from across the country came together in Washington, D.C., for a three-day working conference to exchange views and strategize with nationally recognized educators and researchers.

The WEEA program directors conference, entitled "Educational Equity for Women: Looking Toward the Year 2000," was hosted by the U.S. Department of Education and the WEEA Publishing Center at EDC to provide technical assistance to the 23 projects funded this year through WEEA.

### Gender equity and the National Education Goals

A major focus of this year's conference was the National Goals for Education for the year 2000.

The opening panel discussion, Sex Equity in 1991: Lessons for the Year 2000, brought together such leaders in equity as Ellen Vargyas, Sherry Deane, Margaret Dunkle, and Rafael Valdivieso to explore what must be done now to move toward reaching the goals.

Moderator Ellen Vargyas, chair of the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, began the session by exploring gender equity concerns within the National Goals for Education. For goal 1, concerning school readiness for children (see box), Vargyas emphasized that we must provide the support and social services to women and their families that ensure that children have a home and sufficient food and care. In order to increase the high school graduation rate, the aim of goal 2, "schools and communities must provide the services and a supportive school climate so that pregnant and parenting teens are encouraged and able to complete high school," she continued.

Vargyas stressed that goals 3 and 4, which concern increasing student competency, especially in math and science, are of special concern to girls and students of color because research shows that present standardized testing practices are biased in favor of white, middle-class males. In order to fairly assess all students, we must develop methods and instruments that are not biased toward one particular student group, she said.

In reaching goal 5, which targets adult literacy and lifelong learning, "We must be aware of the strong link between maternal and child literacy," Vargyas stated. Intergenerational literacy efforts should be integral to a literacy campaign. And, finally, in order to rid our schools of drugs and violence, she stressed that adequate drug treatment programs must be established, especially for pregnant teens, and the definition of violence must include sexual harassment and assault.

**. . . we need to keep in mind an overarching goal: equal education without regard to sex, race, or family income.**

Sherry Deane, deputy executive director of the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI), began by stating that we need to keep in mind an overarching goal: equal education without regard to sex, race, or family income. Citing a 1990 report issued by NBCDI, she said, "Poverty and race are the greatest barriers to good educations for African-American children." Deane also stated that in America, African-American women have a ten times greater chance of living in poverty than white males.

Margaret Dunkle, director of the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, emphasized the need to realize that our society is intergenerational, that we can't really help children without helping their families, and that children of today will be the parents of tomorrow.

"We need to help those most in need," continued Dunkle. She cited a recent survey that found that 53 percent of eighth graders had mothers as heads of household with incomes of less than $15,000 a year.

Rafael Valdivieso, vice-president for research of the Hispanic Policy Development Project, pointed out that when we look at high school completion rates, as we must do to achieve goal 2, we must remember to look at those rates for differing demographic groups. "The completion rate for Hispanics fluctuates, but is currently not any better than it was in the seventies," he stated.

"Some current programs work for special populations of students," Valdivieso went on, "but what is going to make a major difference is overall school restructuring that eliminates tracking, special remedial classes, and retention of students behind their grade levels." He pointed out that now when students are placed in remedial classes, they fall further and further behind their classmates, rather than catching up to them.

When schools have solved basic structure and climate problems, Valdivieso continued, "then add-on programs can have a place." He advocated more use of learning methods that we know are effective, including cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and cross-age tutoring.

He concluded that while we must work to ensure that all children are ready for school, we must also be sure that schools are ready for children.

### Females in science

Dr. Shirley Malcom, head of the Directorate for Education and Human Resources Programs, American Association for the Advancement of Science, offered strategies for accomplishing goal 4—improving the science and math skills of American students.

She stressed that in order to encourage girls and women into the field, and to also keep them in it, we must look at the existing structure and make the changes in it that will make it into a field welcoming to all.

"This structure," Malcom stated, "must change to one that includes people from the groups that we are after." We must continue to push for more women, people of color, and people with disabilities to be visible in the field, she said.

In formulating a strategy, we need to include the many different people that influence policy—principals, superintendents, teachers, counselors, youth workers, parents—and we can learn from what other people are doing. As an example, Malcom talked briefly about Sweden, where science is taught in the preschools and the "parent component" is strong.

To implement programs like this in the schools, Malcom noted, we need to work with teachers. "We must give them something to replace the things that we want them to change," she stated. We know that teams of teachers working together can be very successful, and that we also need to let teachers make activities their own and build on them, she concluded.

**Sharing work and results**

Walteen Grady Truely, director of the Project on Equal Education Rights of the NOW Legal and Education Defense Fund, discussed the importance of disseminating information on successful projects, so that other people can adopt and build on WEEA work.

Products can be an important method for encouraging others to develop similar programs, Grady Truely added. Descriptions of model programs, research findings, and other kinds of results can be disseminated nationwide, so that people outside the communities where WEEA projects are begun can reap the benefits of good programs.

When considering product development, or ways of reaching audiences, she continued, it is important to consider the way that the message is packaged. If your project is targeting urban teens, an upbeat video with contemporary music will probably be more effective than a booklet with "serious" information.

**Program evaluation**

A number of the current WEEA grantees participated in project panels to offer experience-based perspectives and suggestions for future strategies on issues that included teen pregnancy and parenting and job training.

**National Goals for Education**

1. By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.
2. By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
3. By the year 2000, American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.
4. By the year 2000, U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.
5. By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
6. By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

One project panel discussed approaches to project evaluation. The panelists were Ralph Nelsen and Kathleen McKean of the Columbia Education Center's Gender Equity for Gifted Elementary Students, S. Lee Winocur of the Huntington Beach Union H.S.D.'s Start Smart Project, and Claire Lavin of the College of New Rochelle's Women as School Superintendents: Breaking the Barriers.

Moderator Gil Garcia, of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, emphasized the importance of documenting program results. We must have a way to measure success, and to know what doesn't work, if we are to be able to hold up examples of what works in teaching math to girls or reducing dropout rates among pregnant students, Garcia stated.

Each panelist offered their rationale for thorough evaluation, including refining your own program and documenting what works for future adopters. Panelists also emphasized the importance of recording "serendipitous" results, results that occurred that weren't forecast.

**Equity and the work world**

Another issue addressed was women and work, in a panel entitled Preparing for a Productive Work Force in a Global Economy: Equity and Job Training. The panel was moderated by Katherine Hanson, director of the WEEA Publishing Center, and participants were Lisa Dobey of Battered Women's Alternatives, Louise Chiatovich of the Sacramento School of Engineering and Computer Science, Sheila McNally of the Hartford Public Schools, and Lynn Mariaskin of the Pittsburgh Public Schools. All direct projects that promote career awareness or training for girls or women.

Panelists suggested a number of strategies to help women who want to transfer from public assistance to entry-level jobs. Chiatovich emphasized the importance of child care, financial aid, and other support systems so that students can attend school or programs full time. She reported that many program participants must leave programs because of family needs. McNally stressed the importance of teaching social skills in addition to job skills. "We often just assume women know these," she stated, "but some people need to learn these." We also need to strengthen self-confidence and to teach survival skills for a hostile situation. This is especially important for job training programs like hers, she continued, in which women are entering nontraditional fields and may be the only woman in a class or on a job site.

### Student retention and teen pregnancy and parenting

Increasing High School Graduation: Addressing the Issue of Teen Pregnancy and Parenting, was moderated by Carrolyn Andrews of the WEEA Program Office. Panelists were Linda Nicks of the Wichita Public Schools, Nancy Hart-Fishwick of the YWCA of Salem, Oregon, Joanne Monroe of Hill House Association, and Joyce S. North of the Memphis City Schools.

Panelists described their approaches to working with pregnant and parenting teens to help them stay in school and access needed services. Schools need, they agreed, a more flexible definition for "dropout," since many pregnant and parenting teens experience interrupted education rather than terminated education. Several panelists stressed the need for flexibility in school scheduling. Hart-Fishwick advocated a strong support system, including mentoring from adults in the community from early in the pregnancy until after birth.

Finally, the importance of working to improve attitudes of staff and teachers was mentioned, since "one [negative] encounter can be the straw that pushes kids out of school," North stated.

### Excellence in education through gender equity

Participants and speakers concluded with an agreement that, in the words of one moderator, "we must continue to promote gender equity as an integral part of quality education."

The moderator continued, "We need to continue to raise questions about how these education efforts translate for girls and women and people of color, and to offer strategies based on our knowledge of what works." Without this continued effort much of the ground gained in educational equity can be lost.

## ERIC seeks equity materials

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education (ERIC/CUE) processes documents on sex equity for the ERIC database, and invites you to submit your work. ERIC/CUE would like to receive any printed materials (published or unpublished) of interest to professionals and the public concerned with education. Appropriate documents include research reports, program descriptions, position papers, feasibility/evaluation papers, curricula, and teaching or resource guides.

Authors retain copyright and are free to submit materials for later publication in journals or other sources.

Send two copies of the documents you would like included in ERIC to: ERIC/CUE, Box 40, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, 212-678-3433.

## New WEEA curriculum

A new curriculum published by the WEEA Publishing Center helps teachers to build student motivation and interest in school.

*Going Places: An Enrichment Program to Empower Students* is a middle school curriculum designed to reduce dropouts and engage students in learning and, ultimately, help them feel connected to high school.

Based on the San Diego City School's successful Seek Out Success model, *Going Places* addresses the specific needs of potential dropouts through enrichment and hands-on, cooperative group learning, as well as concentrating on the learning styles of students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Through a program of personal discovery and skills development, students find reasons to stay in school. The teacher-developed curriculum guides students through a process that includes the examination of personal values and biases, the enrichment of communication skills, and the development of career awareness—all of which strengthen self-esteem and sense of belonging.

*Going Places* is available for $32.00 (plus $4 shipping) from EDC, WEEA Publishing Center, 55 Chapel St., Newton, MA 02160. MasterCard or Visa charges and purchase orders are accepted at 1-800-225-3088 (in Massachusetts 617-969-7100).

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The *WEEA Digest* is published by the WEEA Publishing Center, a project at Education Development Center, Inc., under contract with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position of the U.S. Department of Education and no official endorsement should be inferred.

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